

Oral Practice for Large Upper-Intermediate or Advanced Groups

By *R. M. Serrano-Sanchez*

In advanced level English classes discussions are one of the most widely used oral activities. The problem arises when we have shy students who do not like talking in front of the whole class. If we want them to speak, we have to question them directly and even then, they utter only short sentences making it difficult to judge what their fluency or accuracy would be in longer utterances.

This does not preclude that organizing discussions is useful if only to give our students oral practice. However the range of oral activities must be wider if we want to meet all our students' needs and likes- such as organizing a game where students must interact under the watchful eye of the teacher. To remedy this situation I have developed an activity in which all students have to take part and one in which "tongue- tied students" will find it easier to communicate. This activity will enhance all students' fluency since it will force them to speak in the target language for 30 to 40 minutes, and will make the reserved students feel more comfortable.

Material

The material for this activity has been taken from English magazines, such as *Best*, and *Woman's Own*, from "the problem page" section, where troubled people write asking for a solution to their difficulties. After looking through different magazines, I selected the letters that I thought best suited my aims.

Approach

Before the lesson the teacher has to make two different sets of cards: Set A "problems," set B "solutions" from the original letter and its corresponding answer. Each card must have a little glossary on the back so that new expressions and vocabulary will not hamper the flow of the activity. I know, from my own experience, that if students start asking questions about difficult vocabulary on the cards, you will spend the whole lesson explaining the words, leaving little time to fulfill our aim- namely, having our students interact in English for at least 30 or 40 minutes.

In the classroom, divide the students into two equal-numbered groups, then give Group A, Set A "problems" and Group B, Set B "solutions." The first step is for each student to read his/her card carefully making sure s/he understands it with the help from the glossary on the cards. Secondly each student has to act his/her role (group A: patient, group B: psychologist). The aim is to find the "psychologist" who has the solution to his/her problem. To do so Group A members walk around the class explaining their problems, using their own words and rephrasing the content on

the card, to the members of Group B who, for easier classroom management, remain seated. The "psychologist" must listen attentively and ask questions which will help him decide who his "patient" is.

Once everybody has found the correct partner, the two sit together to discuss the problem, particularly as to whether the "solution" provided is appropriate and satisfactory to both parties.

Follow-up: Each pair explains the problem and solution and the rest show agreement or disagreement. Besides learning the new vocabulary, each student in turns shares the new words and expressions with the other students. This follow-up activity can take place the same day or one day after the game has been played.

Teacher's Role

The teacher serves as the "monitor", seeing that communication takes place. We take note of the most common mistakes, but interfere only when there is lack of communication. After the activity has finished, s/he will point out the mistakes and have the students correct themselves when possible.

This is an activity I produced for my upper-intermediate and advanced students, one that works well in large classes.

The psychologist's game

1. Cards and glossary:

This glossary is on the back of the game cards: The letters (A to M), on the psychologist's and the numbers (1 to 13) on the patient's. See below for examples of the cards and glossaries.

A:

Help for our son

Our son Nigel is 17. In recent months he has seemed very moody and unhappy and though, in the past, he has always talked to my husband and me if anything has worried or upset him, he doesn't seem to want to now. Eventually he did tell me that there are several matters on his mind and that he needs to talk them through with someone not too close, who will take an objective view and help him to see things straight on. Of course this hurts us, but if he needs help like this, I feel we should go along with his wishes. But where should he go? Have you any suggestions?

ANNE

A. MOODY: depressed, unhappy
EVENTUALLY: in the end, finally
CLOSE: near, intimate, involved

13:

Of course you and your husband are anxious to help Nigel, and would like him to confide in you, but there are times when it is easier to talk things through with an outsider. I suggest Nigel contact the National Association of Young People's Counselling and Advisory Services, 11 Newarke Street, Leicester LE1 5SS (tel: 0533 558763). They'll give him details of counselors qualified to help young people in his locality. I hope he can resolve his problems, and that one day he'll be able to tell you what was wrong.

13. OUTSIDER: someone not part of a circle, or group

B:

I can't get over him

My husband left me, and our two young children, seven years ago. He said that there wasn't anyone else but we just weren't compatible. I really don't know how I've coped, but I've struggled through and he has looked after us financially. Time and again I've begged him to return, but he won't. I still love him so much, I know I'll never get over him or want another man. But there are so many times when I feel miserable knowing that he won't come back to me, and I dread the lonely years ahead.

PENNY

B. TO COPE: deal with a task or a problem successfully

TO STRUGGLE: fight

TO BEG: ask for something anxiously

TO DREAD: to be afraid of

12:

For some of us, there can only ever be one love in our lives, no matter how badly things go wrong. You still love your husband and may never become involved with anyone else in the future. However, it's important that you should build up a social life for yourself, and develop a range of outside interests, so that you don't become too isolated and lonely. Try not to dwell on the past, if you can, and concentrate on enjoying a positive future. You can still do this without changing your feelings towards your husband in any way.

12. RANGE: variety

TO DWELL: live in (inhabit) a place

G:

Will he ever be more than a friend?

I have a very deep relationship with a man and although it's not sexual I'd like it to be. He's married, and his wife knows about our friendship. He had the chance to spend the night with me once, but stayed in a hotel instead, saying he didn't want to put himself in a situation he might regret. But he did give me a goodnight kiss which I really enjoyed. I visit him at home when his wife's at work. But now I've been offered a good job in London, which he says I should take.

Should I go and ensure a secure future, or stay, hoping our relationship will develop?

ISABEL

G. CHANCE: opportunity

TO REGRET: to feel sorry

7:

There's no future in this relationship. Your friend is obviously flattered by the attention of someone so much younger, but he's made it clear he doesn't want to become sexually involved with you. After all, he's married and he doesn't want to jeopardise that relationship. Have you ever wondered why he only invites you to his home when his wife's out? It's not fair of him to lead you on- because that's what he's doing. I'm surprised his wife is so understanding. She obviously feels you pose no threat to her. You have the opportunity now to do something with your life, so you must go to London. If you stay you'll only get hurt and will regret letting this chance pass you by. Once you move to London you'll meet people your own age, and will wonder what you ever saw in him.

7. FLATTERED: pleased and made to feel important

TO JEOPARDIZE: spoil, make worse

TO LEAD SOMEONE ON: deceive

M:

My husband is a failure

When I married, my husband was a manager in a well-established company and seemed to have good prospects. We moved to a pleasant area, and bought a nice house on a new housing estate. As the years have gone by, however, he has stayed in the same job while others have been promoted to more senior positions. We seem to be stuck in a rut. Instead of the larger house I'd hoped for, we've stayed in the same one. Our children go to the local school and not to private schools as originally planned. My husband appears to have accepted the situation, and has no ambitions for promotion or plans for bettering our status. I feel totally let down, and can't understand why he's content to be a failure.

JENNIFER

M. FAILURE: not successful

IN A RUT: to be in a fixed situation

TO LET SOMEONE DOWN: to disappoint someone

1:

You seem to give priority to the material things in life, rather than to happiness and contentment in personal relationships. Living in a pleasant town, in a nice house, having a family and a husband who seems secure in his job would, by many women, be regarded as success and it does seem hard that you define your husband as a failure. He may not have the job seniority you'd hoped for, or provided you with the status in society which you'd have liked. But, if he had

achieved them, there's no guarantee that you would both have been happy. The pressures which accompany high positions can sometimes destroy families. I think you have much to be grateful for. Perhaps if you begin to think of the things your husband has given you, you may come to regard him as a success rather than a failure.

1. REGARDED: considered
SENIORITY: higher in rank
TO ACHIEVE: to get

2. *Topic dealt with:*

Speaking personally about private problems in public (in the classroom) can be difficult. If you feel that any of the cards may be embarrassing for your students, you can leave it out.

3. *Useful Expressions to write on the blackboard.*

Psychologist:

What's wrong with you?; Can I help you?; What can I do for you?; What's the matter?; What's up?; Don't worry, You can trust me.; Take it easy.; Tell me all about it, I'll try to help you.

Patient:

I'm in trouble; I've got a problem; I don't know whether you can help me but.; Could you help me?; You see., This is very embarrassing, I don't know how to start; Let's see., I'll try to explain myself, make myself understood.

4. *Solutions:*

Each psychologist card has a letter on the back which corresponds with a number on the patient card. Here it is:

A-13, B-12, C-11, D-10, E-9, F-8, G-7, H-6, I-5, J-4, K-3, L-2, M-1

5. *Number of students*

Up to 26 students can play this game, if there are fewer, some cards can be left out. On the other hand, if there are more, you can prepare two sets of cards and divide the class into two groups.

Editor's Note: The original article displayed 26 cards, 13 representing patients and a corresponding 13 for the psychologist. (See "Solutions" above.) Because of space limitations, we were able to present only a sampling of the cards. The article itself is complete.

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